

Dunn, J. (2017) 1917 and all that: a history of Russian at Glasgow University. *Slavonica*, 22(1-2), pp. 54-64.
(doi:[10.1080/13617427.2017.1405613](https://doi.org/10.1080/13617427.2017.1405613)).

This is the author's final accepted version.

There may be differences between this version and the published version.
You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/152224/>

Deposited on: 30 November 2017

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

1917 AND ALL THAT: A HISTORY OF RUSSIAN AT GLASGOW UNIVERSITY

1. The beginnings

Various events relating to Russia, it is alleged, shook the world in 1917, but one which had a slightly more limited impact was a decision taken by a Glasgow businessman, Sir William Weir (later Lord Weir of Cathcart). Sir William, aided and abetted, it seems, by the then Lord Provost of the city, persuaded a number of his business colleagues to join him in providing the funds to endow a lectureship in Russian. The lectureship was to be tenable at Glasgow University, though the incumbent would also be required to teach courses at the city's Commercial College.

For those blessed with the inestimable gift of hindsight it is easy to raise an eyebrow at the supposed lack of perspicacity of a group of businessmen who chose to endow a lectureship in Russian in 1917 of all years, but if the action is examined in its appropriate context, it becomes much more logical and comprehensible. There are, it is suggested, three parts to this context.

The first part relates to the teaching of modern languages in British universities. This is an activity that starts to acquire significance only in the latter years of the nineteenth century. In Oxford French and German had been taught for pass degrees since the middle of that century, but the Honours School of Medieval and Modern Languages came into being only in 1903; the Cambridge equivalent, the Tripos in Medieval and Modern Languages predates it by only a few years. In Glasgow the first lecturers in Modern Languages, in French and German only, were appointed in the 1890s. This means that by the time of the First World War modern languages was still a new and somewhat experimental discipline as far as British higher education is

concerned. And Russian, as might be expected, played a minor role in that experiment: the hierarchy of languages was headed by French and German; Spanish and Italian came next, some way behind, and only then came Russian. By the end of the 19th century Russian was taught at Oxford, Cambridge and Liverpool; by 1914 their ranks had been joined by Manchester and King's College, London.

The second part of the context concerns relations between Britain and Russia, in particular British interest in Russia and in the Russian language and culture. It has to be said that for the most part relations between Britain and Russia have not been particularly warm or close: the two countries have tended to regard each other as rivals or even potential enemies; worse than that, they seem to bring the worst out in each other, so that relations have periodically been set back by futile and silly incidents of a sort that seem not to occur in either Britain or Russia's other bilateral relations.¹ There is, however, one brief period that serves as an exception to this otherwise dismal story. It is a period that probably began around 1907, when Russia allied itself with Britain and France in the Triple Entente, the 'thaw' gaining extra impetus after the First World War broke out in 1914.²

During this period there is a keen and positive interest in Russia as a country and a outburst of enthusiasm for learning Russian. The latter affects a number of apparently unlikely individuals, including Dr Jane Ellen Harrison, a lecturer in Classics at Cambridge who wrote a

-
- 1 To give but two examples, one from each side as it were, the decision in 1971 to expel over hundred alleged Soviet spies from London and the dismantling of most of the British Council's activities in Russia in 2008. If the nineteenth-century difficulties can be accounted for at least in part by the Great Game, i.e. rivalries in the Caucasus, Central Asia and parts of the Far East, it is harder to explain why these have continued into the twentieth and even the twenty-first centuries.
 - 2 Britain and the Soviet Union were also allies between 1941 and 1945, but on this occasion the friendship was tempered by political differences.

remarkable pamphlet on the aspects of the Russian verb,³ and the then Principal of Glasgow University, Sir Donald MacAlister, who is supposed to have been able to speak seventeen languages in addition to Gaelic and English.⁴ As noted by James Muckle, in the years following 1914 Russian started to be taught in six university institutions, with sporadic non-graduating classes being mounted in a further three;⁵ it was in 1915 that what was to become the School of Slavonic and East European Studies was set up at King's College, London. Glasgow is thus far from being unique.

The final part of the context concerns an issue that perhaps remains unresolved to the present day, namely a tension, when it comes to the purpose of foreign language teaching, between the academic or the philological on the one hand and the practical on the other. In the case of Russian courses set up during the First World War it would seem that the second purpose predominated, and that one of the principal motives for the expansion of the subject was to produce a trained cadre of Russian speakers capable of taking advantage of the copious trading opportunities that would, it was hoped, arise once the allies had achieved their expected victory over Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

It is no doubt for this reason that the expansion was at its most spectacular in commercial and technical colleges,⁶ though it should be noted that Glasgow was not the only British university

3 J.E. Harrison, *Russia and the Russian Verb: a contribution to the psychology of the Russian people* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1915).

4 D.O. Forfar 'What became of the Senior Wranglers?' <http://www.clerkmaxwellfoundation.org/WranglersWhatBecame2008_1_24.pdf> [Accessed 9 May 2017].

5 J.Y. Muckle, *The Russian Language in Britain: A Historical Survey of Learners and Teachers* (Nottingham: Bramcote Press, 2008), pp. 73-4. In addition to Glasgow the universities concerned are Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, UC Nottingham, Armstrong College, Newcastle; Bristol, Edinburgh, Southampton.

6 Muckle, pp. 59-64.

where posts in Russian were created in this period thanks to the munificence of local businessmen: the same is also true of Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield, while a post in Cambridge was supported by the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers.⁷ And in most of these universities, including, of course, Glasgow, Russian continued to be offered without interruption throughout all the vicissitudes of the following decades.

Finding someone able and willing to teach Russian in 1917 was not necessarily easy; Glasgow appointed an Irishman named Hugh Brennan, who at the time was living in Petrograd. It has proved difficult to pin down exactly what he was doing there (though see note 8), but his activities certainly included teaching English, since at one point he wrote to say that his arrival in Glasgow might be delayed by the need to conduct some examinations.⁸ Mr Brennan seems to have acquired an impressive set of letters after his name: in the *Glasgow University Calendar* for 1922-23 (p. 111)⁹ he appears as M.A., L-ès-L, Chevalier of the Orders of St Ann and St Stanislas (Russian).

Notwithstanding his Petrograd commitments, Hugh Brennan arrived in Glasgow in time to mount a non-graduating Preliminary class in the academic year 1917-18, with an Ordinary or first-year class being offered in the following year. Here an explanation may be required: at that time, and indeed right up until 1976, Glasgow University did not offer graduating classes in modern languages to complete beginners. Before joining the first-year class, students who did not have an examination pass in the relevant language (at the time that presumably applied

⁷ Muckle, pp. 74-5.

⁸ In a letter now contained in Glasgow University Archives and seen by the author of this article.

⁹ Accessed at: <<https://archive.org/stream/calendar19221923univuoft#page/110/mode/2up>> [Accessed 9 May 2017].

to virtually all students of Russian) were required to take an elementary class that did not count towards the overall degree. For those who did not want or who were unable to spend an extra year on their degree, there was a short cut, in that it was possible to take the Elementary examination in spring and then the Ordinary examination in the following summer.

By 1920 Mr Brennan was offering a full course from first-year to Honours level. This may seem demanding, but right up to the 1980s it was by no means unusual at Glasgow University for a single person to be responsible for teaching an entire Honours course. This was generally made possible by the fact that the later years of the course were not taught every year, and indeed from the information we have it would seem that before the Second World War very few students went on to complete a Joint Honours degree in Russian.¹⁰ On the other hand, numbers in the first-year class seem to have been remarkably healthy, though there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that this may have been due at least in part to the fact that standards at that level were undemanding; there is also anecdotal evidence to suggest that this is another feature that was not unique to Russian.

Hugh Brennan retired in 1943, when he was replaced by George Birkett, who had been teaching Russian in Sheffield for many years. Mr Birkett taught in Glasgow for only a few years before being taken seriously ill, but his widow and later his daughter had a continuing association with the Department that lasted until the early years of this century.

¹⁰ There is in existence a 'black book', containing lists of students enrolled for all Russian classes from the 1920s up to the introduction of enrolment forms in 1976. Glasgow's first Honours graduate in Russian was the writer and journalist Alexander Werth. According to Denis Brogan, writing in *The Spectator* in 1969, Werth had been taught English by Mr Brennan in pre-revolutionary Petrograd: D. Brogan, 'Emigré's elegy', *The Spectator*, 13 March 1969, 12 <<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/14th-march-1969/12/emigres-elegy>> [Accessed 10 May 2017].

2. 1945-1974

Changes started to take place in the years following the Second World War and following the publication of the Scarbrough Report in 1947. It may at first seem ironic or even downright odd that the first expansion of Russian teaching takes place at a time when Britain and Russia are fighting in a war on the same side, while the second expansion takes place during the Cold War, but it is not as simple as that: the initial impetus for this later expansion can be dated back to wartime period, while the Cold War tended to favour area studies rather than language and literature. Though there are other factors involved, interest in learning in Russian has tended to rise and fall in parallel with the rise and fall of the political temperature.

It was during this period that there was in addition to the first modest addition to the Russian teaching staff the creation of what was in due course to become the Institute of Soviet and East European Studies and later still the Department of Central and East European Studies. 1949 also saw the appointment of the first permanent lecturers in Czech and Polish, although graduating courses in these languages were not permitted until the mid-1950s and full Honours courses had to wait until the very end of the 1960s.

According to notes written by Victor Holtum, Weir Lecturer in Russian between 1949 and 1974,¹¹ the numbers of students studying Russian were healthy in the immediate post-war period, but then declined as the supply of ex-servicemen dried up. The main problem affecting recruitment was the absence of Russian teaching in schools, which meant that students still had to take the non-graduating elementary before or as well the normal first-year course. During this period the Russian staff did a certain amount of what would now be called outreach work, putting on classes for academic staff in other departments and starting up the teaching of

¹¹ See Appendix 2.

Russian in local schools. From the end of the 1950s onwards a number of schools in the West of Scotland appointed Russian teachers (mostly graduates of Glasgow University), so that it became possible to recruit an increasing number of suitably qualified students; this meant that by the mid-1960s it was possible to abandon the elementary class.

From then on the Department enters a period of stability: there were usually about four people teaching Russian, with a certain amount of turn-over as people came and went, in some cases to start up Russian courses elsewhere. Student numbers followed an interesting pattern: there were usually between ten and twenty in the first-year class, with slightly fewer in the second-year class, but numbers in each of the two years of the Honours course tended to be in the low single figures. This pattern can be explained by the structure of the undergraduate Arts degree at Glasgow: at that time two degrees were offered, a broadly-based Ordinary degree, which could be completed in three years, and a more specialised Honours degree that required four years of study (plus a year abroad for modern linguists). The majority of students took the former, which was the standard qualification for those intending to become teachers, and entry into Honours was strictly controlled; moreover, since Glasgow until the 1970s offered only Joint Honours courses, intending Honours students had to satisfy the entry requirements of two separate departments.

3. 1974-2002

A number of significant events took place in the mid-1970s, the first being the creation of a Chair in Slavonic Languages and Literature(s), to which Peter Henry, who had taught Russian at Liverpool and Hull, was appointed.¹² The new Professor made several changes, of which

¹² The question whether 'Literature' should be singular or plural was the subject of a lengthy correspondence between Professor Henry and the University Court before it was decided to

the most important were a single Honours course in Russian and a separate first-year course for beginners. Glasgow now recognised Single Honours degrees, and the former change was straightforward, but the Arts Faculty was less happy about the idea of beginners' language classes so that the latter was rather more controversial. When approval was eventually secured, it came just in time: in the 1970s the decline of Russian teaching in the schools of the West of Scotland was as rapid as the expansion had been at the beginning of the 1960s. In 1976, the first year that the beginners' class was taught, there were eleven first-year students who had studied Russian in school; the following year there were four and the year after that — one. Within three years we had become dependent on beginners to keep our courses going, but we were not alone, for within a further two years or so all the Modern Languages departments in Glasgow were offering beginners' courses.

By the mid-1970s the expansion of the British higher education system, begun in the 1960s, had come to an end, and universities were embarking on a long and apparently endless financial regime of steady state alternating with cutbacks. To cope with this less friendly environment universities devised new methods of assessing individual departments, which, because they were number-based, were widely, if not always accurately, perceived as providing an objective means of measuring performance. The problem of Slavonic Languages was that because the number of students was relatively small, whichever criterion was used, whether it was student-staff ratio, in the earlier period, or income and expenditure, as happened later on, was capable of producing figures that could be interpreted as indicating that we were not pulling our weight. It would be wrong to say that the Department was beleaguered or under

settle on the latter. Following the creation of the Chair the Department became officially known as the Department of Slavonic Language and Literatures.

threat, at least until the early years of the present century; indeed, management tended to regard us with a degree of sympathy and understanding, but we did feel ourselves under a certain amount of pressure.

The pressure could be eased by enrolling more students, and one way of trying to achieve this was to put on new courses. And so at different times the following courses were launched: a taught post-graduate diploma (later a Master's course) in Slavonic Languages; a post-graduate diploma in Russian for Social Scientists; an one-year undergraduate course in Russian for Social Scientists; it was also possible to take advantage of an obscure paragraph in the Faculty regulations to offer a Certificate of Proficiency in a special subject, a device intended to allow those who had already graduated with an Ordinary degree to follow an Honours programme. One of these new courses was the Integrated Honours degree in Slavonic and East European Studies, a new type of Honours degree made up of elements offered by a number of different departments, but principally aimed at exploiting opportunities for synergy with the Institute of Soviet and East European Studies; it was originally intended that this would be the first of several such degree programmes offered across the Faculty of Arts, but in the end it was the only one ever to materialise.

Although some of these courses ran for many years, they were never particularly successful in bringing in extra numbers, and it was sometimes possible to come away with the feeling that they were more trouble than they were worth. We had rather more success when we bowed to the inevitable and started to offer courses that required no language study: for a number of years we offered a first-year class in Russian Literature in Translation, which normally attracted twenty or more students. Subsequently this course and a parallel course in Czech Literature in Translation were developed into a full Honours course in Slavonic Studies:

students taking this course had the opportunity to study language, but were not required to do so, and the introduction of this course had a very significant effect on our numbers.

Although classes were taught jointly to the extent that this was possible, one consequence of mounting all these courses was a proliferation in the number of teaching hours. Indeed, the one criterion, according to which we were more than pulling our weight, was work-load, but in this period neither the Faculty of Arts nor the University was able, in spite of various attempts, to come up with a system of measuring work-load in a way that gained enough acceptance for it be used as a formal criterion for judging departments.

4. 2002 onwards

No subject area of the British university systems can have been more frequently and more thoroughly reviewed than Slavonic Studies. Since the late 1970s there have been at least three national reviews and internal reviews, and these repeated cycles show the remarkable difficulty that both individual universities and the relevant national funding bodies have had in trying to create long-term stability for Slavonic Studies. The outcome of most of these reviews has been neutral or positive for Russian at Glasgow, but just because a review contains positive recommendations, it never follows automatically that these will be implemented.¹³

The Department's run of good fortune with relatively benign managers finally came to an end at the beginning of the present century, when the Faculty of Arts found itself with a Dean who

¹³ The present writer can speak on this subject with some feeling, since he happens to be the author of the most recent national review: J.A. Dunn, *Review into the present state of Slavonic and East European Studies in the higher education system of the UK* (York: the Higher Education Academy, 2013). This review contains a number of what were intended to be positive recommendations (pp. 68-72), but the author is not aware of any actions that have been taken to implement these.

faced a financial deficit, while at the same time being generally unsympathetic towards Modern Languages. In 2002 his proposed solution for reducing the deficit was to close Slavonic Studies. The proposal was presented in a peculiarly half-hearted manner and was withdrawn after nine days, but it did have some important consequences. The first was the departure of two senior members of staff, including the then Professor, with neither being replaced; the second was the merging of the separate Modern Languages departments into a single School of Modern Languages and Cultures (SMLC). For the following ten years or so the climate for Modern Languages at Glasgow was undoubtedly very difficult, and if a point of equilibrium has at least for the time being now been reached, it has left activities at a markedly lower level than they were in 2002: Single Honours Russian, Joint Honours courses in Czech and Polish and the Integrated Honours degree are no longer being offered, and other undergraduate and post-graduate offerings have been merged into courses run by SMLC. Sadly, there seems to be no prospect of the Chair being refilled in the foreseeable future.

Before a conclusion is attempted, there are three questions to consider: who were (and are) our students, what have we taught them and what links have there been between Slavonic Studies in Glasgow and the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia?

5. Who were (and are) our students?

For a long time Glasgow was, to a much greater extent than the other ancient Scottish universities, a local university for local students. In the mid-1970s the overwhelming majority of the students were not only Scottish, but from the university's traditional catchment areas in the West of Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway and parts of the Highlands and Islands. Not surprisingly therefore the only non-Scottish accents heard among the students belonged to students of Czech or Polish origin who had come to Glasgow specifically to study one of those

languages. In fact, before the introduction of the beginners' class, which did to some extent widen the intake, almost all of the Russian students came from between half a dozen and a dozen schools located in the West of Scotland: in Glasgow and the surrounding area, Ayrshire and Dumfries.

Over the years the picture has changed quite significantly: in the University as a whole the proportion of Scottish students has declined significantly: calculations based on figures available on the University web-site give a percentage in 2015-16 of 54.47.¹⁴ In Slavonic Studies, however, including Russian, Scottish students have for some time been a minority: the majority of students come from the rest of the United Kingdom, with a significant admixture of students from other EU countries, both those taking a full degree and Erasmus students spending a semester or an academic year in Glasgow. At the time of writing the future of the relationship between Scotland and the rest of the EU is unclear, but any arrangement that leads to a reduction in EU students would be very unwelcome.

On the question of student numbers, in the period since 1976 these have shown a slow, but not always consistent tendency to increase. If a graph were to be drawn, the straight line would be in upward direction, albeit not at a particularly sharp angle, but the dots for individual years would be distributed both above and below the line in a somewhat chaotic fashion. Thanks in part to the introduction of the degree course in Slavonic Studies, by the early years of the present century there were over 250 students enrolled on or other of the courses offered in the Department.¹⁵ As far as students studying Russian are concerned, the number of enrolments

¹⁴ <<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/planning/qv/dom/d1/>> [Accessed 11 May 2017]. The actual figures are 14,008 out of 25,704.

¹⁵ This figure is taken from internal documents prepared in order to contest the proposal to close the Department that was made in 2002. Changes made to degree programmes since

for the individual years for 2011-12 are as follows:¹⁶

1 st year:	39
2 nd year:	31
Year abroad:	15
Jun. Honours:	16
Sen. Honours:	10

6. What were they being taught?

The 1920-21 edition of *Glasgow University Calendar* (p. 284)¹⁷ contains what is presumably the first Honours syllabus for Russian; it is worth quoting:

I. Translations from prescribed texts in Church Slavonic and Modern Russian.

II. Unseen translations from Modern Russian.

III. General outline of Russian Literature; Political History and Economics; or a Dissertation in Russian.

IV. Questions on the Language of prescribed texts, on the History of the Language and on Historical Russian Grammar.

V. Essay in Russian on one of three subjects taken from each of the following periods:

i. The Kiev period.

ii. The Eighteenth Century.

iii. The Nineteenth Century.

VI. Oral Examination.

The Prescribed Texts for 1921, and until further notice will be taken from:

the creation of SMLC preclude a comparison with the present.

¹⁶ Figures supplied by the Russian staff of SMLC for the Report mentioned in Note 13.

¹⁷ Accessed online at

<<https://archive.org/stream/calendar19201921univuoft#page/284/mode/2up>> on 12 May 2017.

The Ostromirov Gospel; The Story of Tgov's Armament [sic!];¹⁸ The Annals of Nestor; The Works of Tolstoy and Gogol.¹⁹

To a modern eye thus syllabus looks strangely unbalanced with some curious inclusions and some unexpected omissions; it would make interesting reading for anyone with a particular interest in the history of how Russian literature was received in the United Kingdom. By the 1922-23 edition (see Note 18) Tolstoy and Gogol had been replaced by the impressively comprehensive, but alarmingly vague formulation 'The works of the Great Russian writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth Centuries'.²⁰ In some respects, however, the curriculum is surprisingly modern, with the option to write a dissertation in Russian, the elements of political history and economics and the absence of a requirement to translate into Russian

For most of the post-war period Russian Joint Honours followed what was probably by then a fairly standard pattern, one which will be familiar to many readers: two written language papers, an oral, two compulsory survey papers in literature, the history of the language and an option. The options were linguistic and literary: Comparative Slavonic Philology, Russian Drama, Dostoevskii and others, though we were in the fortunate position of also being able to offer courses in Czech and Polish. Single Honours, when it was introduced, was essentially more of the same.

18 This is presumably the text generally known as *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (or *The Lay of Igor's Host*). How Igor became Tgov is one of the great unsolved mysteries of Glasgow University, though initial suspicions are likely to fall on Mr Brennan's handwriting. In the 1922-23 edition of the *Calendar* (p. 296) the name appears in its correct form (<https://archive.org/stream/calendar19221923univuoft#page/296/mode/2up> [Accessed 12 May 2017]).

19 Punctuation and capitalisation is that of the original.

20 The more pedantically inclined reader may feel that the eccentric capitalisation introduces an ambiguity: are these the writers of Great (as opposed to Little) Russia or those Russian writers who are deemed to achieved greatness?

Though there was a degree of movement in the direction of fewer compulsory courses and more options, especially for Single Honours, the basic structure of the courses remained unchanged well into the present century. What did become more varied was the range of options on offer: it became possible to supplement the language and literature courses with courses on such topics as the mass media (an area of particular strength) and Russian cinema. Using the full range of expertise available in the Department we were able to introduce cross-cultural courses, such as the mass media course (which covered Russia, Poland and the Czech Republic) and a course in Slavonic women's writing. Later, as pressure grew to teach to bigger and bigger groups of students, options were introduced that might appeal to students to other departments: a course called 'Domesticating the dictators' compares Russian and Spanish literature; a course called 'Byzantium and the Slavs' is taught jointly with the historians, and for one year only a course called Plotting the Linguistic Map of Europe was made available to all Modern Language students.

Some of the Russian language teaching merits special mention. In the late 1980s we started to receive satellite transmissions of Russian television, and a few years later the Honours level language laboratory class, introduced in the mid-1970s, metamorphosed into a full-scale language course based entirely on materials recorded from Russian television, something that may well have been unique in British universities. Another part of our language work that was unique to Glasgow was the video project. Every year from 1980 onwards the students in Junior Honours (the only year in which there were no end-of-session exams) chose a topic, which could be more or less anything, provided that there was some sort of Russian connection, and each student normally produced a piece of written work relating to the chosen topic. Then, with the help of the Russian assistant and with guidance from a producer in the

University's Television Service, the pieces of written work were turned into a script. Once the script was ready, the students went off to the Television Service, where with the sometimes bemused help of the same producer and a professional crew, they recorded a television programme, usually lasting for about twenty minutes. The project was never assessed, though the finished product was sometimes shown to the External Examiner. In practice the quality of the programmes varied, depending on the number of students involved, their enthusiasm and skill and the topic chosen, but the video project was always considered something of a source of pride. The lack of assessment was mostly seen as an advantage, but with time it became increasingly difficult to undertake activities that were outside the assessment scheme, and with members of staff both within and outside the Department faced with increasing commitments, the project eventually fell by the wayside after running for more than twenty years.

7. Links with the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia

It is reasonable to assume that there were no direct contacts between the Department and the Soviet Union from the start of Russian teaching up to the thaw period, although that should not be taken to mean that there were no Russians around: in the 1950s and early 1960s the staff included two ladies who were brought up in Russia before the Revolution, even if one of these was actually born in Scotland and proudly considered herself to be Scottish.

According to Victor Holttum's notes the first direct contacts with the Soviet Union were in 1961, when a group of students, along with two members of staff, attended a summer course at Leningrad University, travelling out by boat and returning from Moscow by train, as was normal in those days. There was a return visit the following year, but there seem to have been no further developments. More regular contacts began with the advent of the biennial cultural agreements between the UK and the Soviet Union, which set up various structured exchanges.

The first Soviet lectrice arrived in 1965 and from then on we seem to have had a lector or lectrice every year until the British Council scheme folded at the end of the 1990s. Until the very end of the perestroika period the Department had no real input into who was appointed and no clear insight into the criteria for appointment: most were middle-aged women, but some were English specialists, and others Russian specialists; one knew no English at all and insisted on speaking to the cleaner in Russian. With only a couple of exceptions, however, all settled in well and made an important contribution to the life of the Department; many went home speaking English with a Glasgow accent. Glasgow was also on the circuit for Soviet writers, and during the 1970s and 1980s there was a steady stream of visitors, some of them very distinguished; many of their signatures can be seen in the Departmental visitors' book.

One persistent problem was that of organising extended periods of residence in the Soviet Union for our Honours students. By the 1960s almost all British universities required modern languages students to spend a year abroad, but if students of West European languages normally worked as language assistants in secondary schools, that possibility was not open to students of Russian. There was even a great reluctance to allow British undergraduates to study at Soviet universities, more perhaps because of a lack of resources, than for political reasons: by the late 1960s the cultural agreement was extended to include the magnificent total of five places for undergraduates from the whole of the United Kingdom.

Faced with these not so much limited as non-existent possibilities, we found other expedients. Heriot-Watt University had a private exchange with the Maurice Thorez Institute²¹ in Moscow and generously made any spare places they had available to Glasgow students; the Soviet-

21 More properly Московский государственный педагогический институт иностранных языков имени Мориса Тореза, now Московский государственный лингвистический институт.

Scottish Friendship Society had a annual scholarship tenable at Moscow State University, for which Glasgow students were eligible to apply; a number of students even attended a Jesuit establishment at Meudon, just outside Paris. In the mid-1970s, however, the Soviet authorities finally made available about 70 three-month places at Voronezh, Minsk and Leningrad, and a few years after that a significant number of ten-month places were created at Voronezh. As more opportunities gradually became available, it eventually proved possible to find enough places of the right length for all our students, and if the present writer had to name the most important development in teaching and learning to have taken place during his thirty years years in the profession, it would be the year abroad: not only did it lead to a significant improvement in student motivation and attainment, but without it might have been impossible to develop our beginners' courses, since Glasgow degree regulations precluded the offering of an intensive programme in the first or second year.

8. Conclusion

It is not really appropriate to end a paper written to mark a centenary on a pessimistic note, but with a political, economic and cultural climate that is hardly propitious to the learning and teaching of languages, with British universities increasingly adopting a 'supermarket' system of course offerings which restricts the space available to minority subjects and with relations between the United Kingdom and Russia at an even more than usually low point, it is hard to find grounds for optimism. But there is perhaps one small consolation, for if the optimism of those who created the Russian lectureship in Glasgow was misplaced, there is no compelling reason why today's pessimism should not prove equally misplaced. In any case there is no conclusion, since what was started in 1917 goes on and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. And whoever has the task of recording the next hundred years will no doubt wonder at some of the peculiar choices that characterised the early years of the twenty-

first century.

Appendix 1: The Weir Lectureship in Russian

As an endowed post the lectureship in Russian bore the name of its principal sponsor, and Messrs Brennan, Birkett and Holtum were all known as the Weir Lecturer in Russian. After 1974 and the creation of the Chair the title seems to have fallen into abeyance, but the endowment still exists and though it no longer pays an entire salary, it still contributes to the costs associated with one of the lecturers in Russian.²² So perhaps the time has come to revive the title and to allow one of the incumbents to call him- or herself the Weir Lecturer in Russian.

Appendix 2: A note on sources

Most of the information in Section 1 comes from Chapters 2 and 3 of James Muckle's invaluable history of Russian learning and teaching in Britain (see note 5), supplemented, where necessary, by relevant editions of *Glasgow University Calendar*, some of which are available online (see notes 9, 17 and 18). The main source for Section 2 is a set of typewritten notes written by Victor Holtum and bearing the title 'Notes on the history of the Russian (later Slavonic Languages Dept.) at Glasgow University. Observations on the period from 1976 are based on the personal reminiscences, but it may be noted the present writer has produced a detailed history of the Department of Slavonic Languages (later Slavonic Studies) covering the years from 1976 to 2006. This is neither intended nor, indeed, suitable for publication, but it can be made available for consultation under appropriate circumstances.

²² Thanks are due to Margaret Hector, who devoted a great deal of time and energy to tracking down the endowment and ensuring that it was used for the purpose for which it was created.

